



California Department of Public Health Food and Drug Branch



SULFITES

Sulfiting agents are food additives permitted for use as preservatives in food. However, sulfites are restricted from use on fruits and vegetables that are served raw or presented as fresh to the public (e.g., fresh mushrooms, fresh salad bar vegetables). Commonly used sulfiting agents include sulfur dioxide, sodium metabisulfite, sodium bisulfite, sodium sulfite, potassium metabisulfite, and potassium bisulfite.

Sulfiting agents must be declared in the ingredient statement if it is added for functional purposes or present at detectable levels (greater than 10 parts per million or ppm). This is required because some people are allergic to sulfites. Sulfite sensitive people, such as asthmatics, may have difficulty breathing within minutes of eating a food containing sulfites. The reaction can be fatal and requires immediate treatment at an emergency room. Declaring sulfites on the label reduces the likelihood that sensitive individuals would unknowingly consume the food.